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AUTHOR Worsham, Murray E.; Evertson, Carolyn M.
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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the relationship between effective classroom management and the manner in which teachers assign and hold students responsible for written work in junior high schools. Seven more effective and seven less effective teachers were studied, and a summary of each teacher's accountability systems was written. Based on these summaries, the teachers were sorted into three groups: those who were consistently successful in maintaining high levels of student responsibility for their work, those who were partly successful, and those who were ineffective. The findings revealed that the more effective managers (1) were more clear and specific with format requirements for written work, (2) had more consistent and efficient procedures for communicating assignments, (3) had more systematic procedures for regularly supervising and encouraging students as they worked, (4) stressed careful and consistent checking and turning in of classroom and homework assignments, and (5) were more consistent in the use and manner of feedback to students about assignments. The results suggest a definite positive relationship between comprehensive accountability systems for written work and effective classroom management. (Summaries of two teacher accountability systems are appended.) (HTH)

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Murray E. Worsham

Carolyn M. Evertson

Research and Development Center
for Teacher Education

The University of Texas at Austin

Research and Development Center for Teacher Education
The University of Texas at Austin

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Systems of Student Accountability for Written Work in Junior High School English Classes

Most studies regarding establishing and maintaining student accountability have focused on verbal interactions in the classroom. The order and manner in which teachers call on students, how students respond, and the way in which teachers accept, reject, modify, or evaluate student answers provide valuable information on verbal accountability, but until now, little attention has been paid to systems of student accountability for written work. Hammersley (1974) pointed out that although students may feel more responsibility and more social risk during discussion periods which require them to be verbally accountable in front of their peers as well as the teacher, most teachers place more emphasis in terms of grades and assessment on the written work of students. While Hammersley did not speculate on why this should be so, his observation was borne out in interviews with teachers in the Junior High Classroom Organization Study. English teachers consistently reported that they derive far greater percentages of each student's six-week's grade from student written work than from all other classroom performances combined.

Statement of Objectives

This paper focussed on accountability systems for written work; i.e., routines and procedures instituted by teachers for student responsibility of written work, set up and utilized by 14 junior high school English teachers included in the Junior High Classroom Organization Study (JHCOS). Details of the overall JHCOS are presented in the full report (Evertson, Emmer, & Clements, Note 1). Target

teachers in the study were more effective and less effective classroom managers in English and math classes, selected by a number of criteria. The criteria included adjusted classroom achievement, student ratings of the teacher, a management score derived from observer end-of-year assessment, and average percentages of students engaged in unsanctioned, off-task or on-task behavior during academic activities. Classes were grouped according to entering CAT means, and subsamples of more and less effective managers were selected within high, middle, and low initial CAT levels. Among English teachers, seven more effective and seven less effective classroom managers were identified. These target teachers were used in this study of accountability practices.

Methods

In order to study the systems by which target English teachers established and maintained student responsibility for written work, narratives of observations from the first three weeks of school were read and all teaching behaviors which appeared to contribute to student accountability for written work were noted. The narratives were read blind; i.e., without knowledge of which were the more effective and which the less effective managers. A summary description of each teacher's accountability system was written. These summaries were used as a basis for comparison, and the 14 teachers were then sorted into three categories: Teachers who were consistently successful in maintaining high levels of student responsibility for their work, teachers who were partly successful, and teachers whose instructional systems and classroom strategies were ineffective in encouraging, maintaining, or monitoring students' accountability for their work.

Once the analysis of classroom accountability systems was complete, these individual analyses were compared to the two original groupings of more-effective and less-effective English teachers. The comparison afforded at least a preliminary assessment of the relationship between routines for handling students' written work and teaching effectiveness in English classes.

Results and Discussion

Comparison of the accountability systems groupings and the teaching effectiveness groupings indicated a high correspondence between thorough accountability systems and teaching success in junior high English classes. Of the 14 teachers, 11 were placed in the same groups. Such high correspondence indicated that accountability systems are a factor to consider when investigating effective classroom management and student achievement. We will begin our discussion of findings with the analysis and description of the routines we found in use among the 14 English teachers in our study.

Accountability systems have been described as sets of practices teachers use to establish and maintain student responsibility for work. These are dynamic, ongoing cycles that follow the sequence of academic activities and continue from day to day. They begin characteristically with teachers' presenting assignments and instructions to the students, progress through students' working on and completing assignments, and end with the teacher's academic feedback to students. They are among the process measures found to be linked with classroom management and student achievement and involve both oral and written work. The aspects

of accountability systems to be discussed here are only those that involve written work in junior high school classes of target English teachers.

Five Dimensions of Accountability

The following five dimensions distinguished the systems of the more effective versus less effective managers in English classes:

1. Clarity of overall work requirements;
2. Procedures for communicating assignments and instructions to students;
3. Teacher monitoring of work in progress;
4. Routines for checking and turning in work;
5. Regular academic feedback to students.

1. Clarity of overall work requirements. More effective managers presented students with more clear and specific requirements for written work than did less effective managers. These requirements included at least five factors: Form included such details as heading papers for identification; outlining, numbering systems, or paragraphing; whether the work was to be done in ink or pencil; and whether one or both sides of the paper was to be used. Neatness included whether or not paper might be torn out of a spiral or loose-leaf notebook, treatment of errors, and legibility of handwriting. Standards for completeness were determined by whether or not, or under what conditions, the teacher accepted an incomplete assignment. Due dates were either firm (with or without consequences for late work) or flexible (with the teacher formally actively extending the due date or tacitly allowing students to turn in work late with no penalty). Procedures for makeup work addressed responsibility for finding out and completing missed assignments, time limits for the completion and turning in of this work,

and procedures for students to follow to pick up work that was returned during their absence. More effective teachers explained these general requirements to students with greater clarity and specificity than did less effective teachers.

A prevalent example of form requirements involved paper headings. Teachers on the whole tended to be very clear in their requirements for heading forms. They all required the student's name, date, and class to be put in specified corners at the top of each page. Some also required the teacher's name, and others insisted that the month be written in full, not abbreviated. Teachers generally described an example they had put up for the students to see--either on the chalkboard, posted on a bulletin board, or on an OH transparency. Effective teachers, however, followed up on this requirement more than did less effective teachers, reminding the students fairly often during the first three weeks when they should be using the complete heading and pointing out the example.

Practices surrounding due dates, on the other hand, varied widely from teacher to teacher. While experience was necessarily a factor in judging how much time students needed for various assignments, even experienced teachers handled this differently. The more effective teachers tended to set due dates or time limits and hold the students to them. Some of these teachers refused to accept late work at all; others deducted points from the grades of late papers; still others had a late-paper deadline, accepting no papers after a certain number of days. Some of these teachers also emphasized that if the students could not finish their work in the time allotted, they should come to the classroom before or after school to complete it. They accepted virtually no excuses for late or missing homework, and they had students

turn in classwork assignments before leaving, never allowing the classwork assignment to become extended into homework.

Less effective managers allowed due dates and time limits to be extended according to student response, by frequently letting students take home assignments originally intended as classwork. When students did not turn in papers on time, these teachers generally were either casual in their reminders to turn them in when they finished the work or did not even check closely enough to note that not all the students had turned in papers. The consequences for late work, therefore, were virtually nonexistent.

2. Procedures for communicating assignments and instructions to students. Effective English teachers in our sample had more consistent and efficient procedures for communicating assignments and instructions to students which increased the probability that their students would know what was expected of them. Half the target English teachers put daily assignments on the board, and the students were either to copy the assignments or to begin working on them immediately upon entering the classroom. Both more and less effective managers used this technique, the differences being in how well the teacher enforced the procedure rather than the technique itself. The other seven target teachers made assignments or gave instructions themselves as students entered or when the tardy bell rang. More effective managers were consistently organized and prepared to launch immediately into the day's activities, and they saw to it that students were on-task almost before the bell rang. Less effective managers were less consistent, sometimes beginning immediately, but frequently taking several minutes after the bell rang to tend to such procedural chores as erasing or writing assignments on

the board, checking roll, or organizing their materials for the next lesson.

Oral instructions for doing a specific assignment ranged from extreme brevity--simply telling the students to do the assignment, leaving them to determine the instructions; to careful thoroughness--presenting directions and examples and having students repeat or explain the instructions, adding examples of their own. These routines are inextricably tied to context; a teacher's more careful and lucid instructions, for example, were of no value to students who were not paying attention. Effective managers generally gave clear instructions to attentive students, whereas less effective teachers either gave insufficient directions or gave directions to inattentive students.

Many of the more effective teachers had students write assignments daily on an assignment sheet to be kept in their notebooks. In addition, some of these had students keep a record of the grades they made on each assignment. One teacher had students keep a weekly activity sheet with assignments, possible points, and actual points received for each. This teacher also had the students take their activity sheets home each week to be signed by parents and returned. This apparently was designed to serve as a motivator for students, a record of student progress for students and parents, and a means of communicating to parents what was being covered in class, as well as how well their own children were doing in each area of English.

3. Teacher monitoring of work in progress. While teacher monitoring usually has behavioral connotations (e.g., watching students to maintain discipline), it also clearly served an accountability

function in all the effective English teachers' classrooms. One common means of monitoring progress was for the teacher to move around the room, noting the pace and accuracy of student work, and answering questions. Most teachers at least went through the motions of monitoring--either circulating around the room or watching from their desk.

The more effective classroom managers had systematic procedures for supervising and encouraging students as they worked, holding them responsible for completing their task, and giving them credit for a completed assignment. All of these procedures involved some form of teacher monitoring, including the teacher's walking around checking off in the gradebook those students who did complete their work and clarifying requirements about completeness and deadlines for students who were not finished when the bell rang.

Less effective managers were more likely to monitor students during tests but frequently made classroom assignments and then devoted their attention to matters other than students' work. Some of these teachers answered questions as the students tried to begin their assignments, but the narratives indicate that these questions often tended to be requests for repeated instructions, and these teachers usually did not continue to monitor or to note when students completed their work.

4. Routines for checking and turning in work. Routines for checking and turning in written work varied but were always seen in accountability systems of effective managers. Some graded students' work themselves by going to the students and checking each one's assignments, and others took up papers to grade later. Teachers sometimes had students grade their own papers, with answers being found

in the text, dictated by the teachers, or recited by various students called on by the teacher. Another method for checking used by these teachers was to have students exchange papers, using any of a number of teacher-directed patterns of exchange, and determining correct answers in any of the aforementioned ways. Completed written work was generally turned in either before or after checking. Teachers had the students give work directly to them or told them where to put their papers. Papers were then turned in either one by one throughout the class period as students finished; as a group when the whole class was done or the time limit was up; or individually at the end of the period as students were leaving.

Most of the effective managers had a designated spot where completed papers were to be turned in--either a box, basket, or a corner of the teacher's desk or table. One teacher in this group had students put all classwork papers in a box with their class period number on it, whether they had completed their work or not. In this way she prevented the possibility of students' losing their papers and she could check through to determine how much the students had accomplished; whether any students seemed to be having much difficulty; and whether there were any areas of confusion among more than one student. Another of these teachers had students put completed work on the upper right hand corner of their desks as a signal to her.

Less effective managers did not usually stress the checking and turning in of student work. While they sometimes used checking techniques like those of the more effective teachers, they were not consistent in seeing to it that work was checked. They also lacked

systematic follow-up of the turning in of assignments, which matched their laxity about checking and about enforcing due dates.

5. Regular academic feedback to students. Regular academic feedback to students completed the accountability cycle seen in classes of more effective English teachers in our study. In classrooms of more effective teachers, this often involved both a grade on written work and class discussion or recitation of answers. Many of these teachers used a variety of feedback techniques depending on the assignments. A typical pattern was teachers' leading the students through a checking period for homework or classwork papers with the students checking the papers and then turning them in or telling the teacher their grades for him/her to record. Tests, however, were usually taken up and graded by the teacher. Answers then were usually provided orally while students looked over their papers after grading. This combination approach afforded students feedback on how well they performed on their written work as well as providing them with correct answers as a review or learning exercise.

Less effective teachers also used a variety of feedback techniques but were less consistent in their use. Since papers were often not turned in or checked, these teachers had less opportunity to give adequate feedback on written work, and they did not go over correct answers with students as often as did more effective teachers.

Lack of academic feedback appeared to have several effects on students. Primarily the teacher modeled behavior that indicated little concern for academic tasks; she/he did not make the effort to evaluate the students' work, so the students were not motivated to make their best efforts. Secondly, without concrete feedback the students did not

know where they stood in terms of grades nor in the accuracy of their performance. Such ambiguity increased confusion and misconceptions, as well as the likelihood that students' interest and attention would be distracted from academic content. Without personal academic feedback, student assignments became meaningless busy work; study and work habits deteriorated, and academic performance which could have led to learning virtually ceased. The teacher who did not monitor student progress or evaluate student work to give feedback was not in a position to be aware of this or to prevent it.

The Exceptional Teachers

As previously mentioned, three teachers were not easily categorized in the more and less effective groups based on accountability alone. Of these three, one teacher who was in the less effective manager group was placed in the high effective accountability group. She presented a clear and complete system of accountability to her students and appeared in the narratives from the first three weeks to follow through with its implementation. One possible explanation for the discrepancy may be simply that although a working accountability system was a necessary part of an effective manager's tools, this system alone was not sufficient for overall effective management. Another possibility was that this teacher began the year with effective management and accountability techniques, but later these deteriorated, resulting in decreased effectiveness. A possible third explanation may be that this teacher was a good performer; during the first three weeks on days when an observer visited the class, she may have put forth extra effort to prepare for lessons and take charge of her class, resulting in

discrepant data. Further reading and analysis of narratives of classes from later in the year may provide a more precise explanation.

Of the two teachers placed in the medium effectiveness group of accountability, one was a more effective classroom manager and one a less effective manager. The effective manager did have clear overall work requirements and did monitor student progress and completion of assignments consistently. She did not, however, have a consistent system for communicating assignments to students. She sometimes had assignments written on the board and at other times made assignments orally. Also, while her instructions were generally clear, she dealt verbally with inappropriate behavior at the same time she was presenting directions, making it difficult to tell how well the instructions got across to students. It was also unclear from the narratives how often and in what way she provided academic feedback to students, except on one occasion when the students checked their own spelling pretests.

It may be that within systems of accountability, some elements are more crucial than others. In the case of this teacher, it appears that her clear overall work requirements and consistent monitoring of student progress and completion of assignments were efficient enough to promote noticeable student achievement despite the seemingly unsystematic communication of assignments and academic feedback. Apparently her methods and her balance of communicating academic information and behavioral cues and reprimands proved effective.

The second teacher in the medium effectiveness group of accountability was a less effective classroom manager who had consistent procedures for communicating assignments to students and who gave clear instructions. The narratives noted effectiveness in monitoring student

progress during tests, but gave little indication of the amount or kind of academic feedback on written work given to students. During the first three weeks, much time was occupied with housekeeping chores and individual diagnostic tests while other students worked on homework assignments or chatted among themselves. It is possible that the periods of "dead" or idle time which were relatively brief during the first three weeks grew longer during the school year. A chief implication of this is that less class time would be spent on academic content, resulting in less student learning and lower achievement. Examination of the narratives from this class suggests that the existence of an adequate accountability system was not sufficient for overall management effectiveness.

Two Case Studies

Summaries of two accountability systems installed and maintained by two effective classroom managers in junior high school English classes are presented in Appendix A and Appendix B.

Summary

More effective teachers used all the accountability system ingredients described earlier. In addition, these teachers set the classroom stage for student success with behavior management designed to enable students to hear instructions and ask clarifying questions, to work uninterrupted for the period of time needed to complete an assignment, and to check or turn in papers in a consistent and orderly manner. They maintained discipline for the purpose of keeping students' attention focused on academic tasks, and they monitored with frequent cues and reminders to keep students on task. They achieved effective

implementation of their accountability systems by consistent follow-up of instructions, requirements, behavioral standards, and consequences.

In contrast, most of the less effective teachers did not have a comprehensive accountability system for written work. Their weakest areas appeared to be monitoring student progress, completion of assignments, and giving academic feedback. While several of the less effective teachers were consistent in giving clear and specific verbal instructions for assignments, narratives showed that their words were often lost in the noise and confusion of inattentive and disruptive students. The fact that these teachers did not monitor student academic progress ran parallel to their lack of classroom discipline, and their incomplete accountability systems were further debilitated by this deficiency.

In conclusion, it can be seen that this exploratory study has just begun to scratch the surface of the complexity and significance of systems teachers establish and maintain for student responsibility for work. We have only begun to identify and examine the intricate links in the sequential chain of accountability, and it is clear that these systems differ from teacher to teacher, and that accountability links differ according to requirements of classroom tasks.

While successful accountability systems may not be primary requisites of classroom management effectiveness, this preliminary study indicates that there is a definite positive relationship between comprehensive accountability systems for student written work and effective classroom management.

Reference Note

1. Evertson, C. M., Emmer, E. T., & Clements, B. S. Junior High Classroom Organization Study: Methodology and instrumentation (R&D Rep. No. 6100). Austin: The Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, The University of Texas, 1980.

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Hammersley, M. The organization of pupil participation. Sociological Review, 1974, 22, 355-368.

Appendix A

From the first day of class this teacher set a brisk pace, telling students what must be covered and that they must not waste time. She dictated class rules and procedures for the students to write and discussed each one, along with the consequences for breaking it, as she proceeded. She had the students recopy the rules neatly for her to check and for them to keep in their notebooks. Thus in the first three days of school she initiated an accountability system that integrated written work with behavior: She checked their rules and later their notebooks for neatness and accuracy, and the students had their own complete copy of class rules to serve as a deterrent to breaking them.

Upon entering the classroom, students were to read the day's assignments on the board and begin work immediately. The teacher stood by the door each day and reminded the students as they entered to start the first assignment. The teacher's active role increased the likelihood that students would arrive prepared for class and inhibited possible inappropriate entering behavior. It also oriented students toward their academic responsibilities and expedited their getting settled and beginning work. By starting the lesson immediately, she maintained the task-oriented momentum and prevented a time lapse during which the students might be distracted from the academic focus. Thus through her initial words and actions each day, the teacher modeled behavior focusing on the importance of being accountable for academic content and of utilizing class time efficiently.

The teacher kept a weekly chart posted listing the general activities for the week, day by day, with the maximum number of points

students could earn for each activity each day (a possible 100 points per week). The students kept a weekly summary sheet of these activities in their notebooks, recorded the points they earned beside each assignment, and had the sheet signed by their parents each week.

In addition to the weekly chart, each day the teacher listed activities in detail on the front chalkboard. Her lessons followed the order of the list, and several times during each class period she pointed out to students where they were in reference to the list. She told students exactly how much time they could have to complete assignments and suggested that if they needed more time they should come in before or after school to work. While students worked, she walked among the desks, answering questions and seeing that students remained on-task. While this teacher frequently emphasized that completing and turning in their completed work was the students' responsibility, she assisted them with clear-cut directions on how and what to do and reminders to prevent or minimize problems in doing assignments properly.

Again this teacher was modeling accountable behavior while expecting it of students, accepting her responsibility for seeing to it that students learned and could demonstrate their learning successfully. When stressing the students' responsibilities she assumed neither a challenging nor a coddling stance. Her assignments were reasonable, with clear explanations and specific directions, and she enforced the use of productive study habits.

Students who had been absent were responsible for finding out their assignments and for putting them into a specified folder when completed. They were to pick up papers that were handed back in their absence from

an "Absent Basket." The first time the teacher had an absent student's paper to put into this basket, she asked the class where this paper should go, and whose reponsibility it was to get the paper. Thus, she reminded the class of this procedure and simultaneously made it likely that the absent student would be reminded where to find the paper without having to ask the teacher. By using reminders such as these, this teacher increased the independent and smooth functioning of her accountability system and freed more time for actual teaching and learning of academic content.

This teacher was consistent in checking student work. She either had students check their own work as she went over it with the class, and took papers up afterwards, or she had students turn them in to her to grade. Having students record points on their assignment sheets enabled them to see their performance rating from the perspective of a weekly, rather than a daily, or even a single assignment basis.

She had stringent rules for tests. Students were to write in ink and use a cover sheet. She stated that if students' eyes wandered or papers were uncovered, they would be likely to get a zero. She emphasized that her own judgment would determine the need for such consequences, modeling acceptance of her responsibility for enforcing rules she made.

This teacher's pattern appeared to be that of staying with the students through every activity. She reminded them of what to do as they entered the room. She "walked" them through the tasks and activities they covered during the period and was clear and specific about what to do first. She covered instructions for each assignment and reminded them of relevant details to help them complete it

successfully--e.g., time, title, useful resources. Throughout the period, she monitored students' behavior, work habits, and use of proper materials. She consistently gave demerits when students broke specified rules, and she consistently gave academic feedback on written work, returning papers and giving points according to the system established at the beginning of school.

Appendix B

This teacher called herself a "finicky" teacher and had particular ways she wanted students to do virtually everything. On the first day of school she handed out class guidelines to the students and went over each one with them. She had an example of the required heading on the board and discussed it in detail the first day, following up with reminders to use the proper heading each time the students did written work during the first week.

At the bell each day, she went to the front of the room to stand, her signal for students to listen. She then gave instructions or, when appropriate, praised the students for following the directions that were always written on the side board.

Before having the students do any assignment, she gave clear and specific instructions, and often a rationale for the procedure, the assignment, or both. She stated expectations for both quality and quantity of the work to be accomplished during the class period as well as the type of behavior that was acceptable. She stated time limits clearly and told the students when and how their papers would be graded.

She took up homework and classwork assignments and graded them herself. She deducted five points a day, including weekends, for late work, and gave an automatic zero after five days, saying she would assume by then that they were not going to turn in the work. Although she said it was the students' responsibility to find out what they missed, on at least one occasion she took the initiative to explain an assignment to a student who returned after being absent.

During tests she reminded students not to talk to anyone or to have "wandering eyes," and she circulated around the room as they worked. Before taking up papers, especially tests, she reminded the students to check over their work carefully. Spelling tests were exchanged for grading by passing them to the teacher, who then distributed them in such a way that students could not see their own paper being graded. Her rationale for this was to prevent students from spending their time "worrying about the person grading your test." The students signed the paper they graded, and the teacher had them grade using a color different from that in which the paper was written. Students who made 100 on the spelling pretest did not have to take the final spelling test.

At the end of each period the teacher generally told the students what they would do in class the next day and what they should bring to class. This teacher maintained constant control in her classroom, monitoring every activity. She provided frequent cues to remind the students what she expected, walked among them as they worked to be sure they did what she expected, and was consistent in holding students to requirements she made. Her repeated inclusion of rationales added legitimacy to her demands, and her consistent follow-through strengthened her credibility.